

Coping with the aftermath of a Critical Incident

Advice for Students, Parents and Staff

Coping with a CI can be difficult and stressful. It can affect the way we feel, think and behave. The following information will help staff, parents/guardians and students understand some of the feelings and reactions they may experience within hours, days or weeks after an event. There are also some suggestions on what may help them during this time.

Normal feelings and thoughts at this time

Shock	Shock at what has happened. Things may feel unreal. Shock sometimes causes people to deny what has happened. This does not mean you do not care. You may feel like withdrawing, crying or becoming hysterical.
Fear	Fear about the unpredictability of everything, especially life, of a similar incident happening again, of breaking down or losing control, of being alone.
Guilt	Feeling responsible in some way for what has happened even though you are being told you could not be, for not being able to make things better or not being able to help others, for being alive or better off than others.
Shame	Shame for not reacting as you thought you thought you should, for needing support from others.
Anger	Anger at someone or something, wanting to blame, wanting to blame for the injustice of the event.
Confusion	Confusion about the event, about how you should react, about having mixed feelings about everything.
Pain	Pain at the loss of the person, of associating this with other incidents, bereavements or losses that you may have experienced before.
Left Out by People	People not acknowledging your involvement in the incident or your relationship with the person who is injured or deceased.
None of the Above	It may be because the student is not known to you.
Physical & Behavioural Reactions	It is quite normal to experience tiredness, sleeplessness, nightmares, headaches, loss or increase of appetite, bowel/bladder problems, loss of concentration, irritability. Sometimes people feel generally unwell.

Coping with the aftermath of a CI (contd.)

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Remember:

- You need to look after yourself
- You are normal and are having normal reactions to an abnormal event
- There are people you can talk to
- You may not experience any of the above feelings

There is little you can do to avoid these uncomfortable feelings and thoughts but there are things you can do to help you cope.

What you can do to look after yourself:

- Talk** Try to talk about what happened and how you feel. Do not bottle things up. Sharing your experience with others who have had similar experiences may help. Let someone know if you are not coping well. If it is difficult to talk, keep a journal of how you are feeling or draw your experiences or emotions.
- You need to process the incident and allow it into your mind over time. With time you may need to talk or write about it. You may find that you dream about it over and over again. All this eventually helps you to accept what has happened.
- Funeral** Going to the funeral or service may be appropriate.
- Physical Health** Try to eat a regular meal three times a day.
- Make sure you take some exercise and also find ways to relax and rest. Be careful not to use drink or other drugs to help you cope - they may numb the pain temporarily but can lead to other problems.

Seek help if you still feel any of the following four to six weeks after the event:

- You cannot cope with or feel overwhelmed by your feelings.
- You (continue to) have nightmares.
- You experience sleeplessness.
- Intrusive thoughts about the event persist
- You have been using excessive drinking, smoking or other drugs to help you cope since the event

Where can I get help?

If you are a student, always talk to your parents/guardians and/or see Counsellors in the local area.

If you are a concerned parent/guardian, visit your G.P. with your son/daughter and external counselling is available through your G.P.

If you are a staff member, seek support from your GP and/or the LCETB employee assistance scheme.